
CHAPTER 3

The Opening Summer

ON JULY 6, 1925, we gathered at the Toronto Union Station: thirty-five campers, two counsellors and myself. The campers were clad in khaki middies and bloomers and hats, and long stockings, the whole drab outfit relieved by a bright green tie. On the edge of the group hovered the parents, somewhat fearful of the venture to which they had given their sanction. We boarded the special pullman which was to carry us through to Algonquin Park. Some of the campers were two in a berth and had brought with them chicken, cake, sandwiches and games which kept them busy and noisy most of the night. The majority of them were new to me and I to them, and it was utterly beyond any efforts of mine to quiet them down. They were out for a lark.

Our sleeper was dropped in the middle of the night at Scotia, and at 6.30 a.m. we got off for breakfast of a sort at the hotel before starting on the next lap of the journey. At 7:00 a.m. we entrained for Algonquin. On arrival we were met by all the outboard motorboats it had been possible to muster and were taken in relays to camp about two and one-half miles distant. There we were surprised to find Fox News men and their cameras in possession of

our dock. They were from one of the earliest motion picture firms in America and they had been delegated to secure pictures of this adventurous party. How important we felt to be considered worthy of such attention.

Up till now I had looked on Tanamakoon as a veritable garden of Eden; but on this occasion as I looked at it through the tired eyes of the city children, I was not so sure. I wondered if Eden had ever looked so rough and rugged. However, there stood the lodge with the smoke curling out of the chimney, a welcome sight after the hardships of the journey. Inside we found a fire blazing in the huge fireplace and a steaming hot luncheon awaiting us in the dining-room.

The campers ranged in age from eight to eighteen. Most of them were from Toronto, some from Branksome Hall, where I had been teaching physical education. The counsellors, eleven in all, were with a few exceptions graduates or undergraduates of the Margaret Eaton School, so I knew my staff well.

We divided the campers into age groups, or "tribes", with Indian names: "Chickasaws" for the Juniors, "Ojibways" for the Intermediates and "Crees" for the Seniors. Each tribe chose a Little Chief from their own group, and each cabin chose an Indian name such as "Ehwee", the laughing maid, or "Okokoho", the owl.

Though the campers' khaki outfits were rather drab, the counsellors wore a most becoming outfit of light green middies and bloomers. The famous Lombard suits of Boston, the bloomers in both cases were wide and cumbersome, and in addition to that we wore long tan stockings which were on no account to be rolled. There must have been infractions of that code on canoe trips, for the words of an old guide were often recalled. "We're getting near camp now; roll up your socks, and spit out your gum." A few years later, the middies and bloomers were discarded for a trim outfit of shorts and shirts — tan for

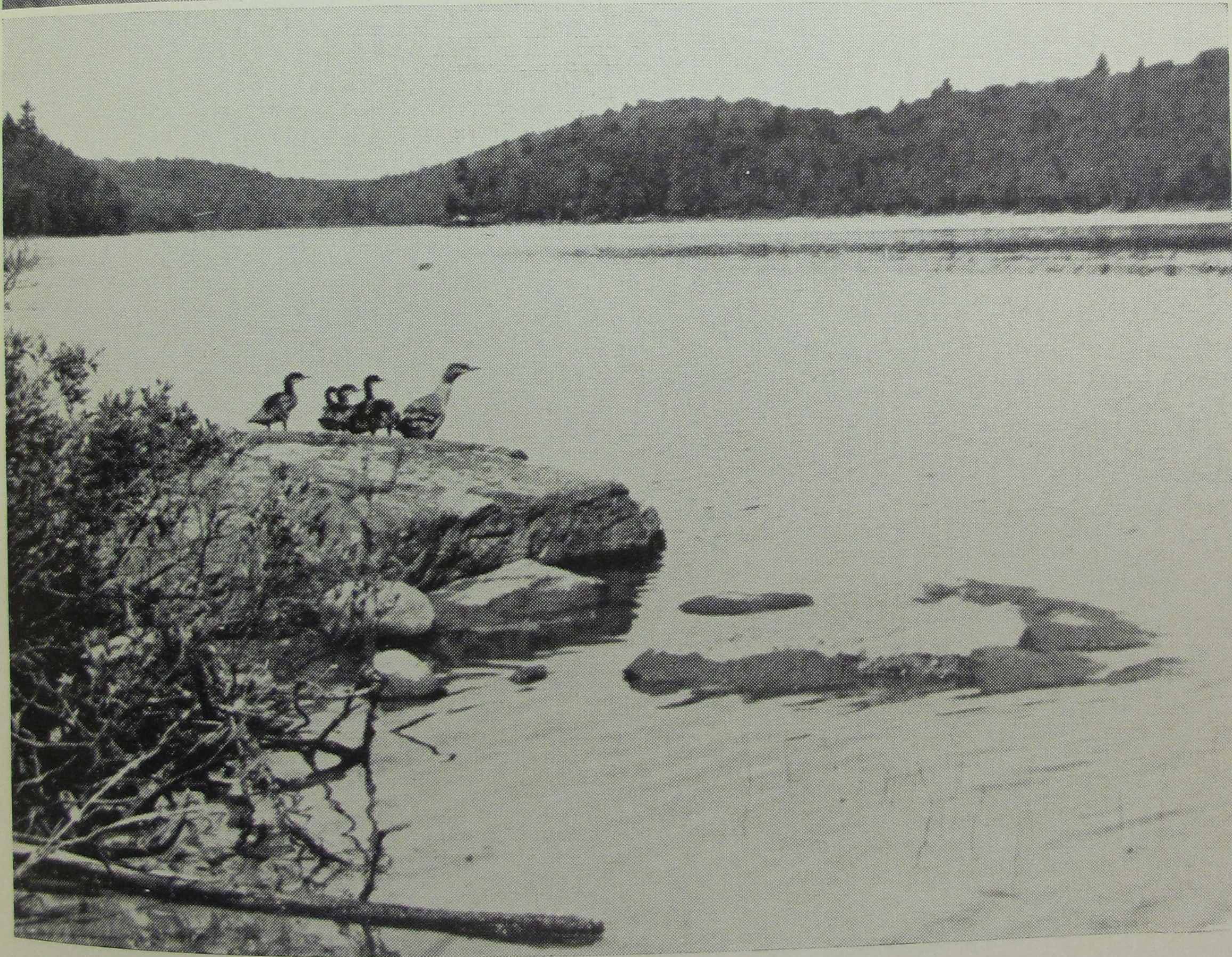
campers this time, instead of khaki, and green for the counsellors. All had dark green pullovers, slacks and socks, and the blending of these colours in the out-of-doors was most pleasing.

The programme was one of Spartan regimentation. Everyone was expected to participate in every activity, even to setting-up exercises and morning dip at 7:00. Awards were given for each activity to stimulate interest and competition, a policy which, I may add, has long since ceased to exist. The old cups at Tanamakoon are safely stored in cupboards as a memento of ancient days. Now campers compete against their own records.

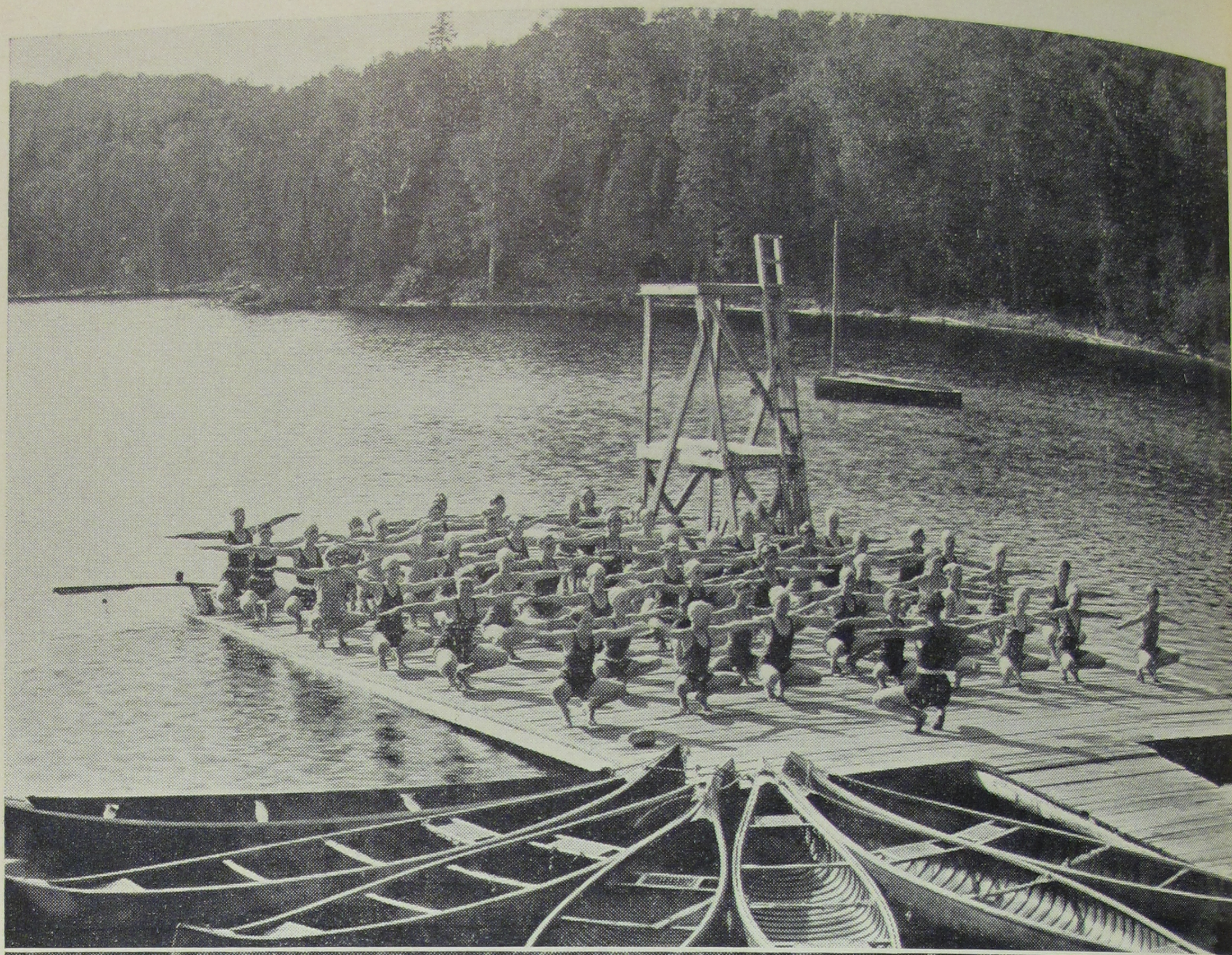
The usual camp skills were taught that first summer: swimming, canoeing, sailing, campcraft, nature lore, dramatics and handcraft. We tried to take advantage of the facilities of the Park and not to spend too much time on activities which could be practiced in the city. Tennis, remedial exercises and English country dancing were the exceptions.

In swimming we adopted as a safety device the recognized practice of using different coloured caps for different degrees of ability. The red cap indicated the beginner, and as each test was passed the camper was awarded the next colour.

The canoe trips under old-time North Country guides have been a unique feature of Tanamakoon from the beginning. Anyone who has paddled and portaged, cooked and slept beneath the stars for days on end will have had never-to-be forgotten experiences: the glimpses of beaver, mink, deer, fox, bear and the beauty of the lakes, the sing-songs and the stories around the fire. All these became the inspiration of songs composed and brought home by campers. These "trip songs" have become part of Tanamakoon tradition, and one needs only to hear them sung in the dining-room or around the camp



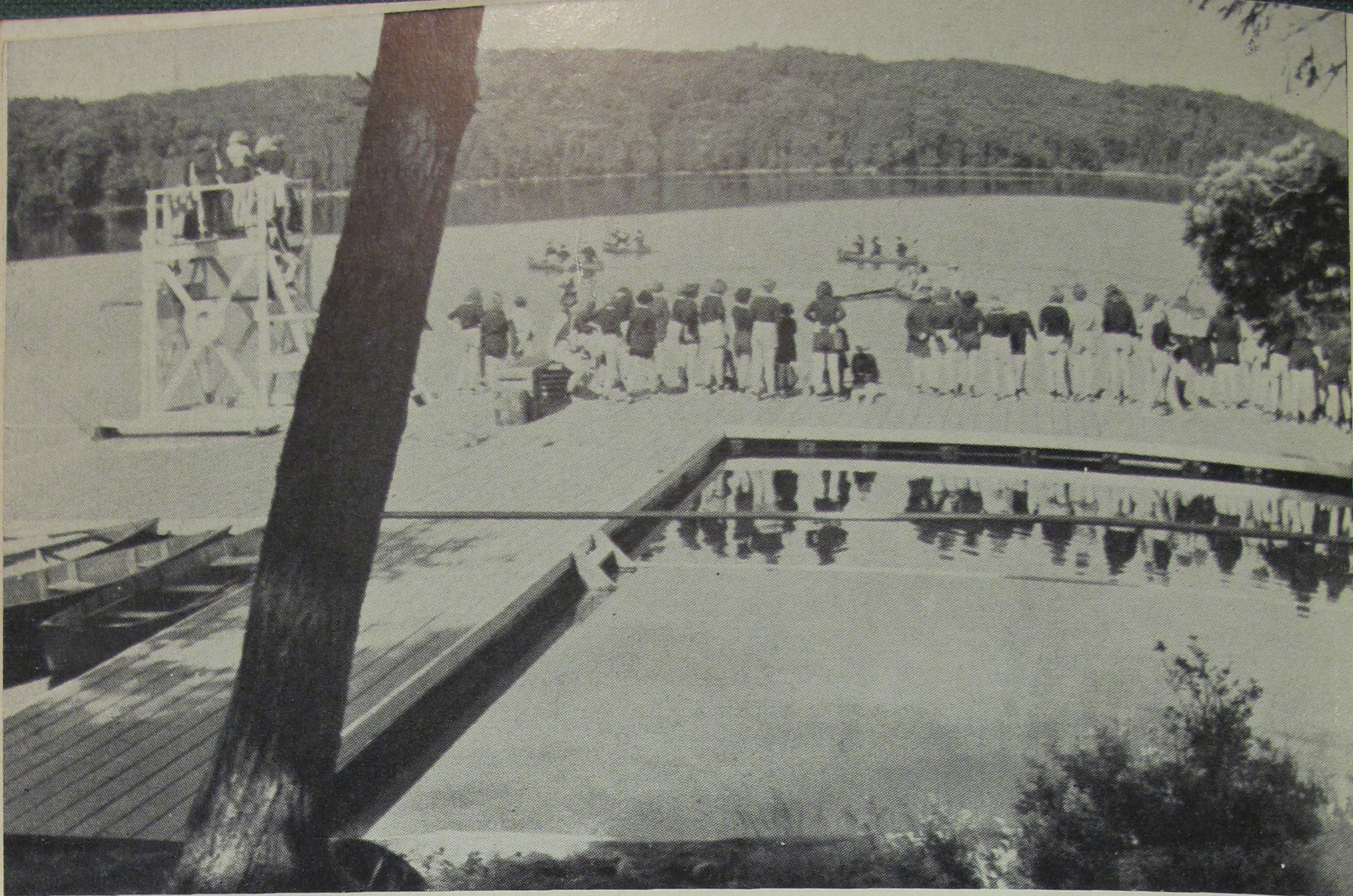
Algonquin Park Station
Tanamakoon Lake



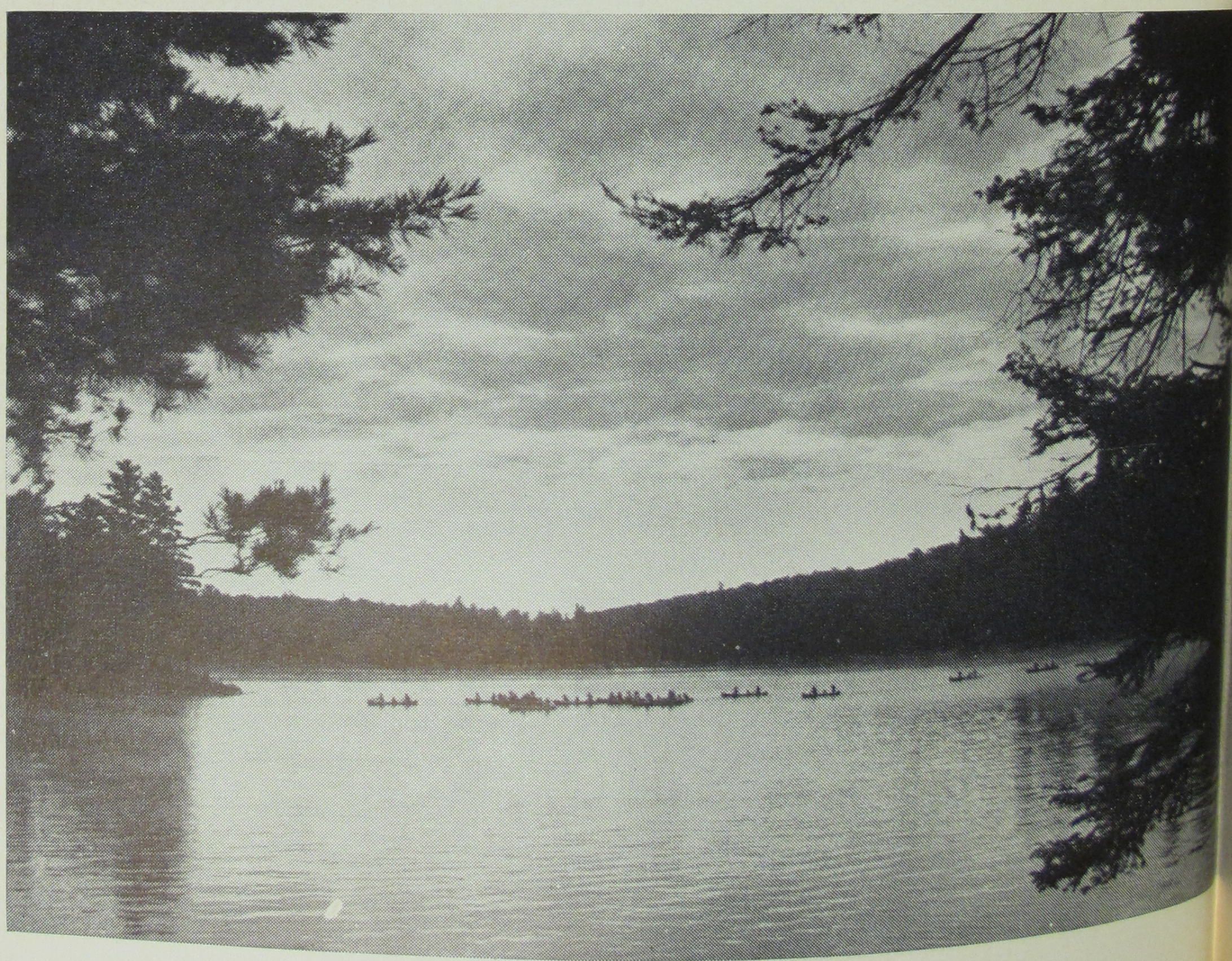
*"Setting up" in the 'twenties
The first Adirondack shelter*



*Is it "golden brown" yet?
Tripping style in the early years*



Farewell to trippers



A flotilla singsong

fire to realize to some extent the part the trips play in the life of the camper.

For those who remained in camp the days were full of adventure, too, for there was always something new. Our first experience in firefighting came one day when a group of tourists failed to extinguish their camp fire on Scilly Island. The result might have been disastrous, but under the direction of a fire ranger the campers and counsellors formed chain crews, wielding hatchets and digging trenches to stop the advance of the blaze. That evening honorary ranger badges were bestowed on each member of the crew by the Chief Park Ranger.

There were the trips to Skymount, the tower from which the fire rangers kept a lookout for forest fires, and from which seven lakes could be seen. Especially we loved the trip to Beaver Pond, white with water lilies, on whose muskegs, or floating islands as we called them, grew the fascinating pitcher plants and other rare flowers. Beaver Pond was a naturalist's paradise. Its delights were inexhaustible. In the evening there might be a paddle up the Madawaska creek to watch the beaver at work in the dusk. Best of all were the sunsets, breathtaking in their splendour, which greeted us night after night as we came from the dining-room and held us spell-bound in quiet little groups on the verandah till the last colour had faded. And there were the nights we were wakened by an excited staccato whisper, "The Northern Lights are out", when we would make our way to the dock to gaze in silence as the mysterious lights marched across the sky. These were experiences that left their abiding mark on each of us.

The love of Indian adventure led us to adopt some Indian customs as well as names in those early days, customs such as pinning on a blanket and going to a council fire, stalking home from council fire in silence, and using the Indian expression of applause, "How! How!"

One Saturday night at a weekly council fire of the whole camp, one little brave stated that she did not see how we could expect the little braves to be brave when the Big Chief was yellow. Apparently one night when she should have been fast asleep she had heard what had gone on outside her cabin. The Director passed by and the counsellors were being too noisy. She spoke to them in no uncertain terms, and strode on to her own cabin. She was soon back saying in a very different tone of voice, "Nora, Nora, there is a mouse in my cabin!" Nora went along and together they disposed of the mouse. The following Sunday while stories were being read to campers around the fireplace, a little mouse ran along the edge of the mantelpiece. The Director nobly and conspicuously put her hand out and caught and dropped it outside the window, with the secret hope that she would regain face and now be noted for her bravery.

The familiar "How! How!", the tribal set-up and the Indian names still exist. As for the Indian council fire, it was short-lived. We decided not to be Indians any longer, and proceeded to be our own natural selves and have a council fire which was vital to our own interests and needs.

The first four weeks of this first camp season ended all too soon. Those campers who were staying for half time were taken to Toronto and the second group brought back. We had not given much thought to enrolments for August, taking for granted that everyone would find camp so exciting they would want to stay on. The parents, however, had other plans for their children; so August found us with fourteen campers and eleven counsellors — no money and as I thought in darker moments hopelessly in debt. To climax all this misfortune the seventeen-hand horse ate a bag of potatoes and promptly died. The cook, quite unaware of our precarious position, saved the day. "Miss Hamilton," she said as she stirred up the batter for

the pancakes, "I feel in my bones this camp is going ahead and I would like to have a part in it. I have \$1,000.00 to invest. Will you sell me some shares?" I didn't tell her what a wave of relief her words brought to me. If I had had any real doubts, I couldn't have accepted her offer, but I knew in my heart that Tanamakoon *was* going ahead, and we would not let her down. And we didn't. During the fall and winter others followed suit, and \$10,000 of preferred shares were fully subscribed. Ten years later they were all redeemed.

The rangers and guides of the Park came to our aid that first summer and helped us in many ways. Mark Robinson, a deputy chief ranger of note, visited the camp frequently and educated us in the ways of the wilds. The campers delighted in his stories of bears and wolves, of old timers in the Park and of Tom Thomson. Mark might well have included the story of Archie Belaney, had he known at the time how famous a character Belaney was to become. The Park was patrolled by rangers on the lookout for trappers stealing furs. Belaney had made a bet that he could cross the Park from boundary to boundary in the dead of winter without being caught. His boast was voiced abroad, he was traced and found with badly frozen feet. Mark cared for him in his own cabin for three weeks, but did not know till some years later, when a visitor to the Park brought him greetings from Grey Owl, that Belaney and Grey Owl were one and the same.

The guides, too, were full of adventure stories of early days. They were of a type who are almost extinct in the Park today. Most of them made their living by guiding in the summer months, and came from places in the vicinity of the Park, like Killaloe, Madawaska or Whitney. We were quite inexperienced in the art of tripping and the guides started us off from the beginning with the accepted techniques. Not one ounce more than was



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